



CAPITAL 5
— FAMILY WEALTH —

What's in a gift?

The lost art of participation

In our society, the act of giving or gifting has become somewhat clinical. We give because a Hallmark holiday shows up on the calendar, or because the tax code looks upon us more favorably if we gift at certain intervals. Or, we gift because an organization approaches us and pleads its case. Giving or gifting becomes an item to check off the long task list of daily life. We sometimes bypass the social dynamic and the sheer enjoyment that could have accompanied the action.

Why we give...

At the most basic level, we give so we may receive – not from a selfish perspective – but because it feels good to help a person or a cause for whom we care deeply. Giving feels good because many of us have received so much during our lifetimes – gifts of mentorship, education, career opportunities or wisdom. Giving lets us right the equilibrium of the give/receive dynamic.

The lost art of participation

Even though it has the opportunity to carry all the enjoyment and meaning described above, giving instead becomes a reaction or a default, often triggered by external circumstances. In the process, our own receiving becomes an afterthought.

Consider how it can feel – to you and the recipient – to harness the lost art of participation. The next time you're ready to initiate a gift – to sign a check or mail a package – ask yourself a few questions. Then, consider enclosing a note with your gift – the gift of your own experiences or intentions.

- ▲ What's the impetus for this gift?
- ▲ How do you feel about this instance of giving?
- ▲ What do you want the recipient to know about what this act of giving means to you?
- ▲ What has been your most profound experience of receiving a gift (consider gifts in the broadest sense – money, opportunity, mentorship)?
- ▲ What could the receiver of the gift you're about to impart learn from your past experiences of receiving?

Participation in the giving process allows us to reclaim the give/receive dynamic that is so central to the experience. Giving up your seat on a train to someone who needs it more creates a reciprocal flow of gratitude. If you carry out the same action yet you add eye contact and a smile, you've reclaimed the lost art of participation. Participation allows gifting to carry its full impact for both the giver and the recipient.

As always, please feel free to call with any questions regarding this or other important topics.

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